

TRANSCRIPT

When Every Student Matters: A K-12 Approach for Supporting Students and Promoting Graduation

NARRATOR

Hello and welcome!

We're excited to bring you *When Every Student Matters: A K-12 Approach for Supporting Students and Promoting Graduation*, one in a set of videos and related materials from our team of researchers and technical assistance providers at the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL West) at WestEd. Our key message is that when students receive effective academic and non-academic supports, they can overcome barriers that get in the way of school success.

Ask any educator and he or she will tell you that when children come to school, they bring their world with them—the experiences and influences, both good and bad, from all parts of their life.

For many students, this means they start school with a strong foundation for learning and success, and as they progress through the grades they continue to receive supports and opportunities from their family, school, and community. But for millions of other students, their world can get in the way. Mounting evidence shows that poverty, trauma, and difficult life circumstances can create significant barriers to learning. For these students to become successful learners and to graduate with a high school degree, they need the right kinds of additional support. Educators and communities are taking up the challenge to meet the needs of the “whole child,” providing both academic and non-academic supports to help students succeed. Such support includes tutoring and mentoring; healthcare; meeting basic needs; and enrichment opportunities.

This video highlights one community in Utah that has linked schools across the grade spans, called a cone, to provide additional support to students whose worlds are especially challenging.

The Roy Cone includes over 8,000 students attending Roy High School or one of the 10 elementary or junior high schools that feed into it. Together with the Weber School District and community and business leaders, Roy High and the partnering schools are using a collaborative approach to better help their students succeed in school.

When staff at Roy High asked hard questions about its attendance and graduation rates, student achievement, and postsecondary transitions, it caused them to rethink ways to improve student outcomes. They found that their school not only needed to do more to support its own most vulnerable students, but also needed to find a way to expand supports to the lower grades, with the intent of intervening earlier to stop problems before they start. For an

overview of the Roy Cone efforts, let's first hear from one of its founding leaders, Gina Butters.

GINA BUTTERS

So the rally cry of the Roy Cone has been the power of one: one child, one teacher, one team, one community. And, really, all centered on one dream, one outcome, which is everybody graduates college and career ready. So we decided that we were going to try an all-in cone-wide approach. And, in hindsight, best decision we ever made.

In order to do that you need everybody on board. You need everybody that has an impact at any given point along a child's trajectory to be involved and invested and committed. If we were going to own the child, so to speak, from K through 12, we needed to address some pretty basic foundational issues we were seeing. And so we realized we were going to have to put in some very bold, strategic interventions at the earlier grades. Those kinds of interventions probably wouldn't have even been talked about without all of the right people at the table.

We really tried to build every initiative that we came up with around this idea that we needed to pay more close and particular attention to each individual child. And what that entails is asking every educator involved to broaden their capacity. Counselors were asked to go beyond what they normally would have seen their job to be. Teachers were asked to take on and adopt, so to speak, an individual child that they saw that was struggling and to pay more attention to that child and provide more intervention and class to those children. Every educator goes into the "biz," so to speak, because they care about kids. I don't think, though, that many of us realized how much more capacity we have to care about kids.

NARRATOR

Although still in its early stages, the Cone has already begun to make a positive difference. Focusing at the high school, three strategies in particular stand out: the "Royal Review and Reward," student advocates, and home visits.

The Royal Review and Reward is one of Roy High's academic safety nets. It "catches" students whose grades have fallen and provides them with extra instructional time with their own teachers throughout the week—to relearn content, make up credits, and earn passing grades.

GINA BUTTERS

And every school has its own version of this, but we at Roy High called it the Royal R and R Program. It's called Royal Review & Reward, and it's a mouthful, but what it entails is providing incentives to kids that are achieving and doing what they need to be doing: coming to class on time, coming regularly, achieving good grades, turning in homework, staying current in class. And then also providing—besides incentives—providing interventions for kids that weren't meeting certain standards. It has been a huge game changer for kids that are struggling because they've been able to access their teachers every class, every week and get the extra help that they've needed in class.

MATT WILLIAMS

So the difference between the R and R program is, it's built into the schedule so that kids have to be there. They're in class already, so it's a little extra time that they get to spend with their teacher.

MICHELE KERSEY-SMITH

The R and R period has allowed us to actually give help right after we teach the concepts in class. Before, we just had to take a chance the student could come in before and after school.

MATT WILLIAMS

It gives teachers a little bit of extra time each day to work with those kids that need some help. It could be the top-end kids that had questions about, you know, the assignments. It could be the kids that had missed a couple days—that had a missing assignment—that they could work with them one-on-one. They could be in small groups. We had teachers that were bringing in tutors during the R and R so that those students would get a little extra time and a little extra attention, which helped academically and attendance-wise, both.

During reward they could go to the commons, they could do some silent study time in the cafeteria, they could go to a computer lab and work in the computer lab, or they could go to the library. And so that was their reward. And so the reward portion of it...kids started getting really, really protective of that reward portion. They earned it, they worked hard to get there, and they deserved it.

NARRATOR

To better understand why some students are struggling in or disengaged from school, the Cone also supports students—one by one—with “student advocates,” who help them get back on track.

KIRT SWALBERG

So basically how a student advocate came about was, obviously, we needed...we had a need to help some students, and we figured very early that as administration counselors that we couldn't do it all. With doing the other responsibilities that we had we needed some extra support to work with them. And so we wanted this person...is not a disciplinary person at all. This is a person of support. Just what the advocates...you know, in the name “advocate.” They advocate for this kid. They want this kid to be successful, as we all do, but their role is that of, “How can I help you? How can I help you to get to school? How can I help you to do well in school?”

KELLIE HALES

Basically it's someone extra—someone extra to throw that lifeline to a student, just someone extra to reach out to the student, someone extra just to let a student know that they're cared about and that they're being watched over. And someone that's gonna stick up for them, someone that's going to mediate for them with a teacher, mediate with their parents, mediate

with administration. A student advocate is able to just follow through with a student, making sure they're getting their homework in. Kind of just tracking them on homework, attendance, and just basically someone that they know is there for them.

KIRT SWALBERG

We found, too, sometimes, it was some emotional needs that had to be met, you know, as well as even at times physical needs, you know. And that student advocates are critical in working with the families—not just the student but the families as well. And not just the high school student but also if there's a junior high student there, also if there's an elementary student—working with that whole family as a cone to help that student be successful.

Student advocates and counselors are housed at the same place in the high school. They meet once a week and discuss kids—their needs, what's going on. Counselors are one of the best ways that we identify our students.

KELLIE HALES

So if you were to talk to a student about what their advocate is to them, I would say that they are not only a friend but someone that they can rely on and that they know they can always trust. And someone that they're accountable to.

KIRT SWALBERG

We have students that just need a little extra push, a little extra kindness. Just somebody who cares.

NARRATOR

In the Cone, student support reaches across grade spans, schools, and families, with home visits opening doors to address many non-academic barriers to learning and school success.

GINA BUTTERS

We decided we were going to go to our struggling families versus waiting and asking them to come to us, inviting them to come into the school setting.

KIRT SWALBERG

When we haven't seen the kid for a few days, you know, and we've made contacts and still nothing has come about, that's when we're going to do a home visit. And so we always go in pairs and...plus, just to know that there's more than one person that supports them.

KELLIE HALES

So then I will get with a counselor, preferably their counselor so it's a familiar face. We would make arrangements so a teacher could go on their prep hour to go to the home of these students. By taking teachers and counselors out on home visits, they were able to see the lives of their students and why their students were having the issues that they were having. And a lot of times it's just knowing that someone's here at school that cares about them; that

they're not just a student in a school, that they are a person in a school, that they are wanted. You will be able to see how students live. You'll be able to see why your students are missing school.

If we would get to the home and realize that it was more than just a motivational issue for them to come to school, we would use our community resources. By doing home visits we are not only able to connect with the student that was missing from the school but we are also able to connect with the whole family. We are able to provide resources and information that would better the family.

KIRT SWALBERG

And it makes a difference when you show up on somebody's door. They know you really care 'cause you're really making an extra effort.

NARRATOR

The Roy Cone educators have helped students make good progress on a number of fronts and they are striving for even better student outcomes.

GINA BUTTERS

We have all of these academic increases going on, and we have all of these behavioral infraction decreases going on at the same time. Attendance was at 29 percent in terms of chronic absenteeism—kids missing ten days or more per school year. We reduced that the first year down to 13.7 percent. Grades—failure rates have plummeted. Graduation rates—we started with that baseline number of 71 percent about for the Cone, and it's gradually increased every year. We jumped up to 84 percent after the first year as a cohort, and that's a huge jump.

So we know for a fact that the culture shift that's happening to one of...we are more focused on academics here in the Roy Cone and we will also help you in your pursuit of a better academic outcome.

DR. JEFF STEPHENS

We came to recognize that this really was something that was done one student at a time. And the student advocates that they had, the counselors, administrators, teachers—everyone really worked together.

GINA BUTTERS

So even though it's been a challenge to ask our educators to work harder, I think we've also seen many people infused with energy because they've felt the reward, the intrinsic reward, of watching kids succeed, and seeing when they take a risk and go outside of their comfort zones, so to speak, to help a child—what benefits can come from that.

MATT WILLIAMS

We're all on the same team. The purpose with even the elementary schools, and the junior highs, is to help those kids graduate.

NARRATOR

The Roy Cone exemplifies how one community—to use its own words—is “stringing together wins for kids” by providing students with the academic and non-academic support needed to succeed in high school and beyond so that each of them has the promise of a brighter future.

Thanks for watching! For more information on this and other topics related to dropout prevention, please contact REL West at RELWest@wested.org. We'd appreciate it if you would complete our online survey regarding this video at <http://surveymonkey.com/r/SupportingStudentsVideo>. Your feedback matters and is used for planning future events and videos.